



Do horse owners know how to care for their horses?



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INTRODUCTION

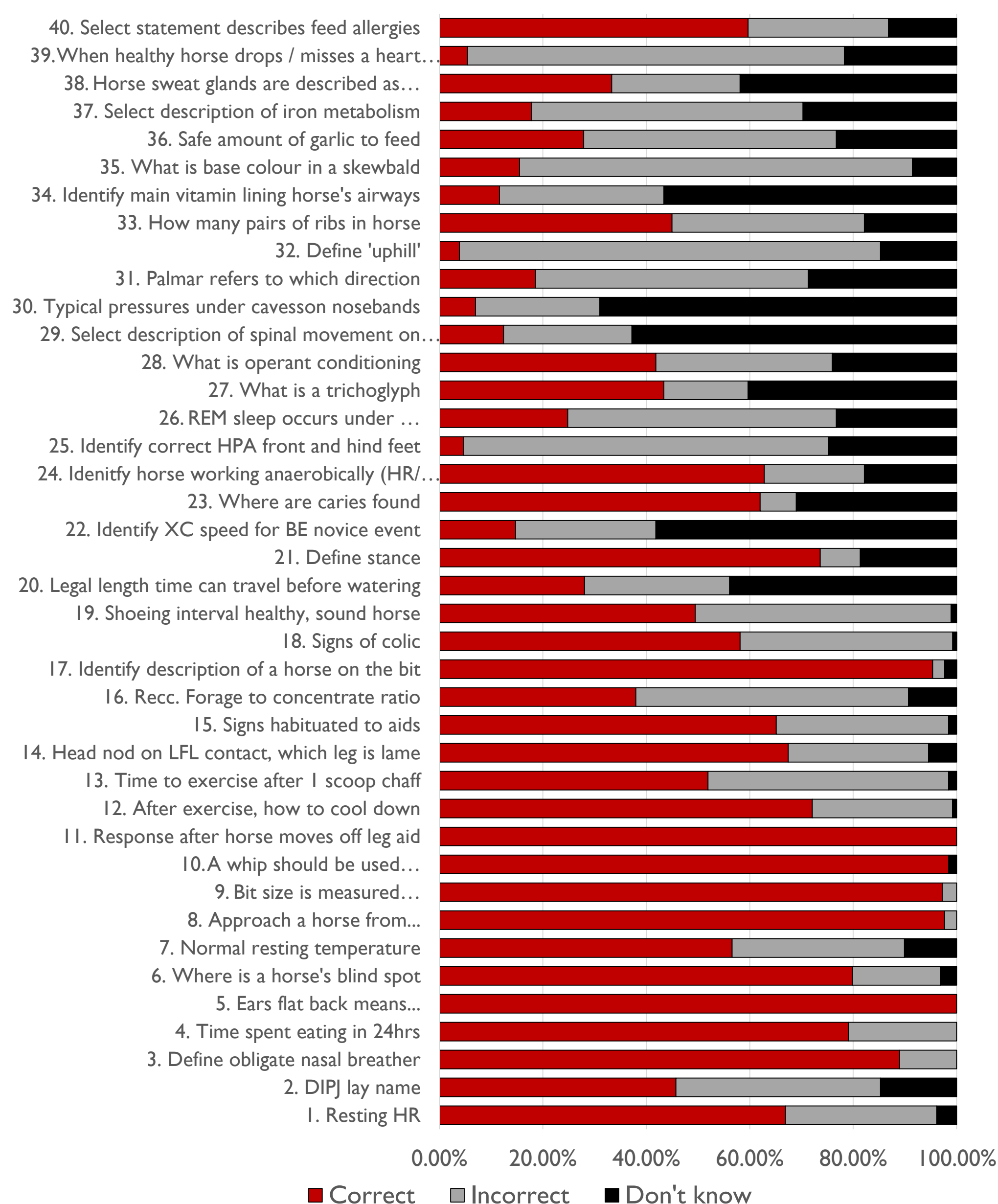
Horse owners have a duty to safeguard the wellbeing of horses in their care. However, within recreational equine populations, a substantial proportion of welfare problems reported are linked to unintentional neglect due to owner ignorance.

Research objective: *to assess the equine knowledge base in a preliminary sample of UK horse-owners.*

METHOD

128 UK horse owners and riders, >18 years and with variable educational achievements (no degree: n=74, undergraduate degree, n=27, postgraduate qualification, n=27) completed 40 voluntary questions in an online multiple-choice survey, distributed via equine-related Facebook™ sites,. Questions covered topics related to equine management, health, behaviour and welfare, and were categorised as easy (n=14), medium (n=14) or hard (n=12) in terms of difficulty. Frequency analysis was used to determine response rates. ANOVA with post-hoc LSD tests identified differences in knowledge between difficulty.

RESULTS



The majority of respondents answered 'easy' questions correctly (78.71%), with 18.36% selecting incorrect answers and 2.93% stating they did not know the correct answer (Figure 1).

Less than half of the participants answered 'medium' questions correctly (47.29%), with 31.51% selecting the incorrect answer and 21.21% not knowing the correct answer.

Even fewer respondents attained the correct answer for the 'hard' questions (21.51%), with the majority either selecting the incorrect response (46.17%) or not knowing the correct answer (32.32%).

Differences in correct responses between the question categories were significant (ANOVA: $F=25.18$, $df=2$, $P=0.0001$). Interestingly, as difficulty increased, less correct answers were scored and it appears 'don't know' became a more preferred response (Figures 2-4).

Fig. 1: Responses to questions. EASY: Q1-14; MEDIUM: Q15-28, HARD: Q29-40

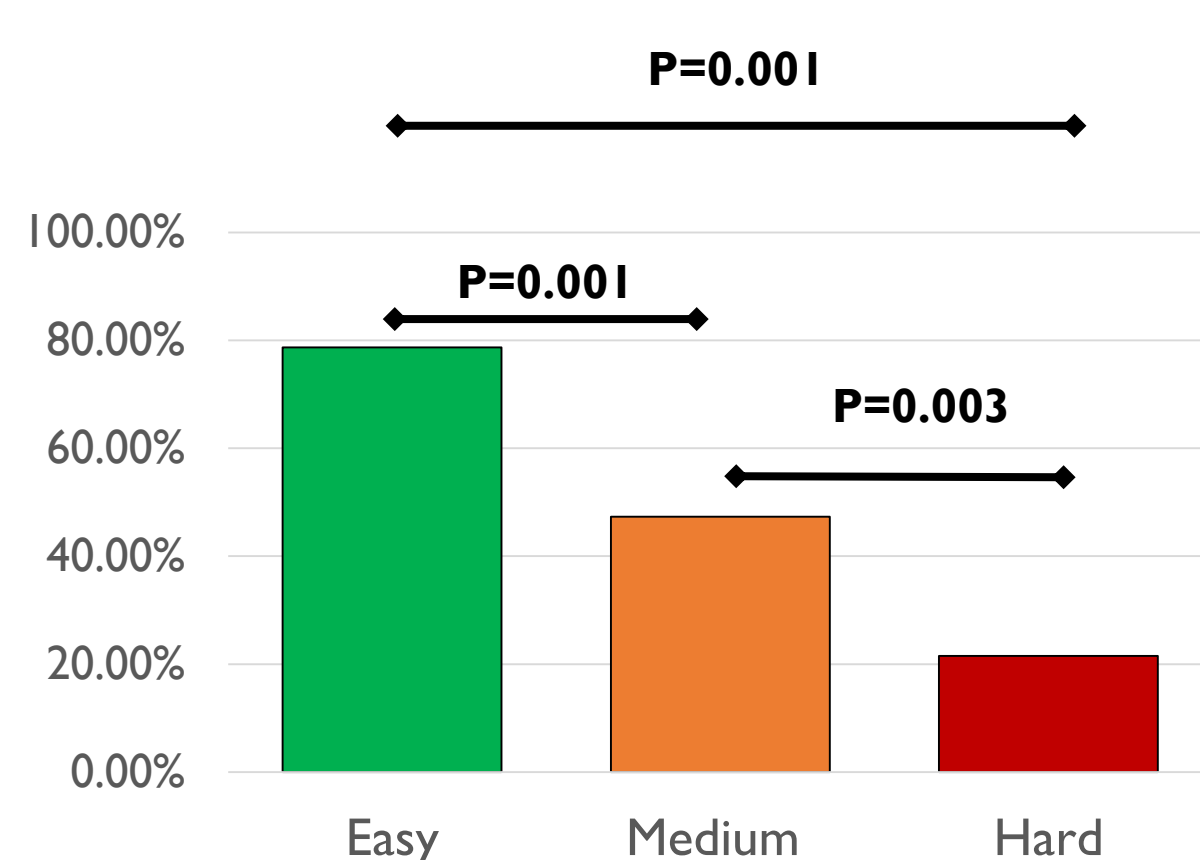


Fig. 2: Correct responses

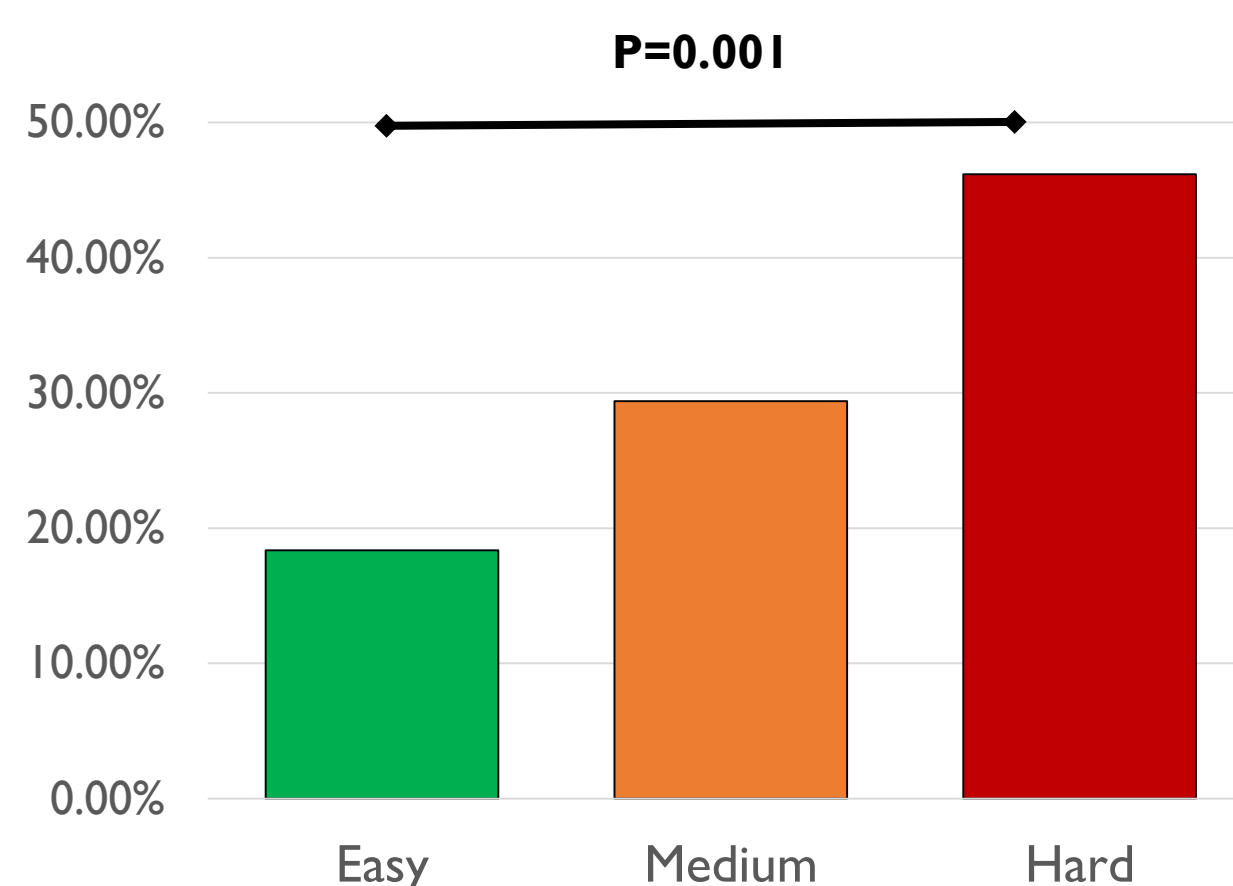


Fig. 3: Incorrect responses

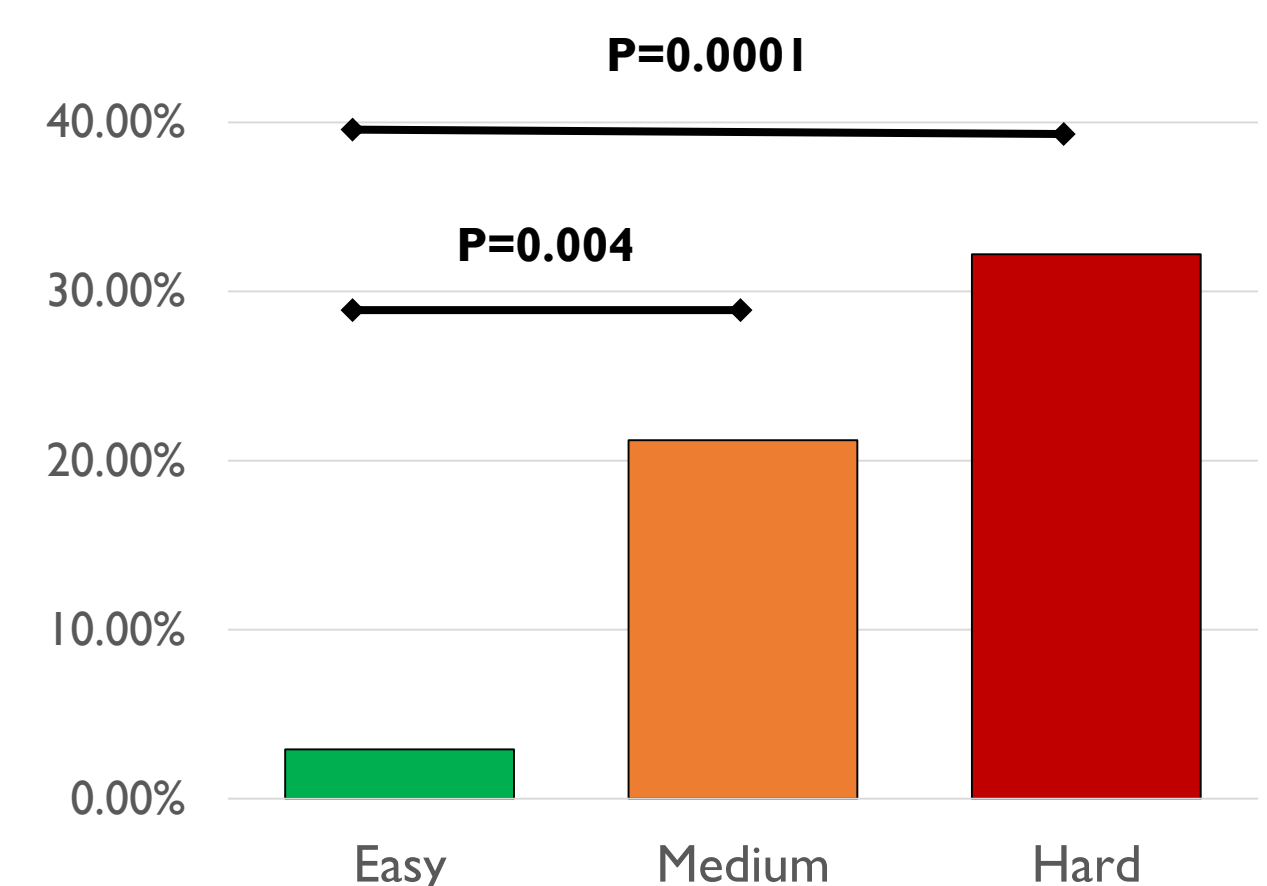


Fig. 4: Don't know responses

CONCLUSIONS

These results suggest a lack of fundamental knowledge exists in these horse owners, which has the potential to negatively impact equine health and welfare. Further research needs to identify if this is a universal phenomenon in the equine industry and explore strategies to educate horse owners and by association improve equine wellbeing.

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